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Nuns Pray for Removal of Nuclear Waste in Bridgeton

By Kevin Killeen

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<http://stlouis.cbslocal.com/2013/06/07/nuns-pray-for-removal-of-nuclear-waste-in-bridgeton/>

BRIDGETON, MO— (KMOX)—A bus load of nuns made a pit stop at the West Lake Landfill for a prayer vigil seeking the removal of radioactive waste at the site.

Some sixty nuns with the Franciscan Sister of Mary are calling on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to remove some 8,700 tons of radioactive waste from the Manhattan Project buried at West Lake. They want it taken to a secure, federally-approved storage site away from populated areas and “pathways to the environment.”

The Franciscan nuns live in Bridgeton and have been smelling the odor from the underground fire burning at the Bridgeton Sanitary Landfill — a fire about a thousand feet from the nuclear site.

“This is something that we need to give our attention to,” said Sister Jeanne Derer, “and we need to stand by the people who are really affected by this and who don’t seem to be getting many good answers to their concerns.”

When asked about the EPA’s recent announcement that its readings taken by a special airplane flying over the site found no danger to the public from the nuclear material on site, Derer said she’s still waiting for others who are evaluating the data to determine whether that’s the final word.

The Missouri Coalition for the Environment has raised concerns that radioactive material from the West Lake Landfill might be migrating through groundwater beneath the burning Bridgeton Sanitary Landfill. The group also notes that the EPA plane tested only for gamma radiation and not for alpha and beta radiation.

Meanwhile, on the site work crews have completed the task of removing concrete pipes that had been unintentionally feeding oxygen to the underground fire. Between now and Labor Day, workers will cover the burning landfill with plastic tarps in hopes of smothering the fire.

Missouri Attorney General Chris Koster reached a court-approved action plan in May with the land fill owners, Republic Services, to try to put out the fire. Koster has warned there could be more drastic steps taken if evidence suggests the fire is getting too close to the underground nuclear material.

Sister Derer says she has also been in contact with U.S. Senator Claire McCaskill of Missouri, asking her to prod the Army Corps to remove the nuclear material. Why the material hasn't been removed through the Corps "Formerly Utilized Sites Remedial Action Program (FUSRAP) is not clear, Derer said.